

“Charity” Accused of Sex Abuse Coordinating ID2020’s Pilot Program For Refugee Newborns

A biometric identification program backed by the ID2020 alliance will see its new “digital id” program rolled out for refugee newborns in close coordination with a charity tied to Wall Street and prominent Western politicians whose workers have been accused of sexually exploiting refugee children.



BY **WHITNEY WEBB** JULY 29, 2020 11 MINUTE READ



iRespond, an international non-profit organization that is “dedicated to using biometrics to improve lives through digital identity,” has begun piloting a new biometric program for newborns among the predominately Karen refugee population along the Myanmar-Thailand border, a program it soon hopes to “quickly deploy” at a greater scale and make available to the general global population. The pilot program is being conducted as part of the controversial ID2020 alliance, backed by Microsoft, the GAVI vaccine alliance and the Rockefeller Foundation, and with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a non-profit organization deeply tied to the Western political elite and Wall Street with a controversial track record of silencing numerous sex abuse and fraud allegations.

The new program, an extension of iRespond’s “voluntary” biometric identification program in the Mae La refugee camp, “will create a record of a birth, attested by a trusted clinic, with a goal of changing the life trajectory for the participants.” Through the program, “a guardianship relationship between the newborn and the mother is established and linked to digital and high security physical identity documents.”

However, iRespond's CEO, Scott Reid, **told *Biometric Update*** that these credentials do “not carry the same weight as a true birth certificate,” but asserts that the organization's biometric “birth attestation” program “could leapfrog the traditional barriers to establishing identity.” Despite the fact that iRespond's quasi-birth certificates would seemingly serve little purpose in areas where actual birth certificates are readily available, the organization notes that “once the pilot is completed, iRespond is ready to quickly deploy the solution at scale” for mass use around the globe. “Product development” on adapting their platform for newborns began earlier this year and Reid notes that having an iRespond-provided biometric “birth attestation” will enable “access to vital services such as healthcare, social protection, education and banking.”

The pilot program is being conducted at the Mae Tao clinic, which is largely funded by the CIA cut-out USAID as well as the governments of Germany and Taiwan, the Open Society Foundations and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC is very active in the day-to-day functions of the clinic (financed by a USAID-funded project) and it is also intimately involved in iRespond's digital identity program, including its new pilot program for newborns and its earlier efforts to supply Mae La's residents with biometric identity.

Food or Sovereignty

iRespond's work in Mae La in conjunction with IRC was first announced by the ID2020 alliance in September 2018. The ID2020-funded pilot program, **the announcement states**, was to be “led by Alliance partner iRespond and will be conducted in close partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC).” It aims to provide biometric identities to the approximately 35,000 individuals inhabiting the area, with the newer program aiming to ensure that babies born in the community are also made participants by default upon birth. It notes specifically that “the pilot will offer blockchain-based digital identification, linked to individual users through iris recognition, for refugees accessing the IRC's services in the Mae La Camp in Thailand.” Having a “digital identity” would allow refugees “to access improved, consistent healthcare within the camp” with plans for the same system to eventually “electronically document both educational attainment and professional skills to aid with employment opportunities.”



Migrant workers pass the Thai-Myanmar border in an official service truck as they leave Thailand from Mae Sot in Tak province in northern Thailand. Photo: AFP/Ye Aung Thu

A year later, the program, featured in [a lengthy profile](#) in *Newsweek*, was revealed to be “just the first step in an effort that aims to equip the camp’s entire refugee population with secure and portable “digital wallets” that will hold not just their medical records but also educational and vocational credentials, camp work histories and myriad other records,” ostensibly including financial activity. This is particularly likely given that iRespond is [partnered with Mastercard](#), [another ID2020 partner](#) that is closely allied with the company, Trust Stamp, a biometric identity platform [that also doubles](#) as a vaccine record and payment system. In addition, IRC’s [strategic plans](#) for Mae La through 2020 include “expand[ing] micro-enterprise development and village savings and loans associations,” such as those offered by ID2020 partner [Kiva](#), among others, who link biometric identity to the receipt of loans.

iRespond’s system, not unlike Trust Stamp’s, is also slated to serve as a vaccine record. Larry Dohr, iRespond’s head of Southeast Asia operations, [told Reuters](#) in April that “a biometric ID system can keep a record of such people [who have previously tested positive for Covid-19] and those getting the vaccine.” Dohr added that “we can biometrically identify the individual and tie them to the test results, as well as to a high security document. The person then has ‘non-refutable’ proof that they have immunity due to antibodies in their system.” Dohr then refers to such “proof” as a “very valuable credential.”

Notably, in press releases and news reports, iRespond executives emphasize how their biometric identity system, based on iris scans and powered by Microsoft, will “protect privacy” and allow “control and ownership of identity data belong to the holder.” However, the Mae La project does not offer this degree of control and ownership, [with Newsweek noting that](#) “Eventually, [iRespond and their collaborators] **aim to offer** the refugees a level of fine-grained control over what pieces of personal information are shared

with others.” In other words, such control over their personal information has not yet been made available to them, despite the public portrayal that this functionality is a base component of iRespond’s system.

What is particularly noteworthy about iRespond’s and IRC’s digital identity efforts is that, while it is a “voluntary” program, destitute refugees wishing to access healthcare and other services IRC provides in the area, including access to clean water, must have their irises scanned in order to reap those benefits. It is highly unlikely that such individuals are not only uninformed about any potential risks of providing their biometrics for use in a pilot program, but are not in a stable enough state to make an informed decision on the matter, as their precarious position would see them choose urgent healthcare needs, etc. over privacy. It increasingly seems that Mae La was chosen as the pilot project because its residents were highly unlikely to decline participation, especially when healthcare access and other basic needs provided by IRC are dangled as carrots on a stick and only accessible upon participation in iRespond’s biometric identity program.

This program is remarkably similar to the World Food Programme’s recently implemented “**Building Blocks**” initiative, which is **funded by** the US, German, Dutch and Luxembourgian governments. Building Blocks uses a blockchain-based biometric identity system “to expand refugees’ choices in how they access and spend their cash assistance” in Syrian refugee camps within Jordan. Now, “over 100,000 people living in the camps can purchase groceries by scanning an iris at checkout” as part of the checkout. Those who do not participate are unable to access their WFP “cash benefits” since they are available exclusively through this biometric system, leaving refugees the choice between surrendering their biometric data and food.

Equally noteworthy is the fact that those financially supporting the Mae La project and similar projects, particularly **the ID2020 alliance**, are “hopeful” that iRespond’s efforts in Mae La will some day be rolled out on a global scale. Indeed, **Newsweek noted** that “many of the funders [of the Mae La project]—part of what’s known as the ID2020 alliance, which includes Accenture, Microsoft and the Rockefeller Foundation—hope the Mae La project could eventually serve as a blueprint for the world’s millions of stateless people, **as well as citizens of developed nations and everyone else.**”

Biometric Enclosure

According to iRespond’s rather spartan website, their biometric identity platform “primarily relies on iris biometrics, the best modality after DNA for accuracy and reliability.” It further describes its platform as follows:

“When a new participant is enrolled, an encrypted biometric template is created from their iris scan and a randomly assigned 12-digit number is drawn from a pool of 90 billion numbers. On subsequent visits, the identity of the participant is verified when their template is matched and the system returns the original 12-digit unique identifier.”

iRespond’s platform also “easily integrates into healthcare, humanitarian aid, research, and human-rights applications,” and it **has been used** to grant refugees and other vulnerable populations access to food, healthcare, and other forms of aid provided by foreign NGOs operating in these areas. It has also been used to keep track of **participants in clinical drug trials**. iRespond’s platform in the latter

case **was used** by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in conjunction with Johns Hopkins School of Public Health (both are **iRespond partners**), to track participants in clinical HIV treatment trials in Senegal as well as **an additional Johns Hopkins study** in South Africa. It has also been used to track recipients of the controversial HPV vaccine in Sierra Leone, **where it was used** “to track patients who have not completed their vaccination series.”

It is also being used among “vulnerable groups” in Myanmar **by the NGO Population Services International** (PSI) to “track demographics and the timing of positive HIV tests.” By analyzing these details, “we uncover which groups are most vulnerable to becoming infected,” according to PSI’s country representative for Myanmar.

The non-profit’s platform is powered by its main tech partner and another ID2020 member, Microsoft. iRespond’s platform “couldn’t exist without the cloud,” according to its CEO Scott Reid, and Microsoft supplies iRespond with a \$60,000 grant to its Azure cloud system, allowing the organization to use it free of charge. In addition, Microsoft donated 39 tablets to iRespond that are used by the organization in the various places it operates “to enable flexibility in the field.” “The number of people we have helped has rapidly gone from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands, and we look forward to soon working on behalf of many millions of people. These Microsoft tools are helping to make it possible,” iRespond’s Larry Dohr stated in **a Microsoft profile**.



Eric Rasmussen · TEDxSanJuanIsland

Eric Rasmussen, iRespond’s president and chairman of the board, is a particularly interesting character who has been quite frank about the rationale behind the creation of iRespond. “When you understand who someone is, **you understand what they’re entitled to**, whether that’s national citizenship, international refugee support, or simply food distributions,” Rasmussen told Microsoft last year.

In addition to his key role at iRespond, Rasmussen is a professor at the Google-backed “Singularity University” as well as **chairman of the board at InSTEDD**, a “global NGO specializing humanitarian informatics, particularly around health in resource-poor economies” that is partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the CDC, Google and UNICEF. In addition, Rasmussen is also the CEO of a “profit-for-purpose” company called Infinitum Humanitarian Systems (IHS). IHS **works closely with** USAID and the State Department **as well as** U.S. military intelligence agencies and intelligence/defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton. **Prior to his roles** at iRespond, IHS and InSTEDD, Rasmussen was the Principal Investigator in humanitarian informatics for the Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and made multiple war time deployments to Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Charity” of the Predator Class

More troubling than the background and associations of iRespond are those of their partner in the recently announced newborn biometric identification initiative, the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC **describes themselves** as responding “to the world’s worst humanitarian crises and help[ing] people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future.”

Despite the IRC framing itself as a “humanitarian” venture, its board is stuffed with a sordid mix of Wall Street criminals and war criminals. For example, **its board is co-chaired by** Timothy Geithner, former Treasury Secretary during the 2008 financial crisis **bail-outs** and current President of Wall Street titan Warburg-Pincus, and Susan Susman, an Executive Vice President at Pfizer. Its **board of advisers** includes war criminals Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright as well as Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell. Also present are current and former leaders and top executives at McKinsey, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Kroll Associates (“**the CIA of Wall Street**”), PepsiCo, Bank of America, Lehman Brothers, Citigroup and the World Bank. Another advisor is former chairman and CEO of AIG Maurice “Hank” Greenberg, a name that **will likely be familiar** to those who have researched the September 11th attacks and Wall Street financial crimes in general.

Since 2013, the IRC **has been led by** David Miliband, **the Tony Blair “protégé”** who Bill Clinton **once called** “one of the ablest, most creative public servants of our time” and who **worked closely with** then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton while serving as the U.K.’s Foreign Secretary. So close was Miliband to the Clintons, that he was **being considered** for a “top U.S. government job” if Hillary Clinton had won the 2016 election.

In the years since joining the IRC, Miliband’s salary as the group’s president **has ballooned to nearly a million dollars annually** (up from approximately \$240,000 when he arrived at the organization in 2013). In addition, the group has been mired in scandal since Miliband became its president. For instance, it **was revealed** in 2018 that IRC was one of several U.K.-based charities where “workers [were] alleged to be in sexually exploitative relationships with refugee children” including through “sex-for-food scandals” where “sexual abuse was so endemic that the only way for many refugee families to survive was to allow a teenage girl to be exploited.” Reports **further alleged** that IRC and other charities named in the report, including Save the Children, had known of the egregious abuse for years prior to the allegations being made public and chose not to act.



Myanmar refugees, who crossed over from Myanmar to Thailand when a battle erupted between Myanmar's soldiers and rebels, eat at the Thai-Myanmar border town of Mae Sot November 8, 2010. A clash erupted between ethnic minority Karen rebels and government soldiers in Myanmar's Myawaddy town opposite the Thai border town of Mae Sot, Reuters witnesses on the Thai side of the border said.

REUTERS/Chaiwat Subprasom (THAILAND – Tags: POLITICS CIVIL UNREST) – RTXUDI7

That year, it was also found that the IRC had “silenced 37 sex abuse, fraud and bribery allegations,” resulting in the U.K. government, which had previously funneled millions to the organization, cutting off its funding entirely. Despite the troubling revelations, no IRC workers accused of wrong-doing were ever prosecuted.

Given the fact that the IRC's board and presidency is stuffed with professional exploiters, from Wall Street to the public sector, it is hardly surprising that this “charity” would be caught doing the same under the guise of providing “aid” to the world's most vulnerable populations, who they apparently view as easy prey.

Foxes in the Hen House

In the several media profiles of the iRespond-IRC biometric identity effort, the initiative is described as helping to prevent the exploitation of the world's most vulnerable, particularly forced labor and sex trafficking. However, if that really were the case, why is this program being executed by iRespond, whose president and chairman has close ties to the U.S. military and intelligence communities, and the IRC, backed by a legion of war criminals and financial predators?

The U.S. military, a close partner of iRespond’s Eric Rasmussen, is notorious for its role in **the trafficking of persons for forced labor**, while many of **its key contractors** – like DynCorp — have been the subject of **numerous scandals** regarding the sexual abuse or sex trafficking of war-torn or otherwise vulnerable populations. On the other hand, the IRC’s mix of backers like Madeleine Albright, infamous for **her comment** on the murder by sanctions of half a million Iraqi children being “worth it,” and Henry Kissinger, notorious for **his words** about using food as a weapon to force populations into subservience and to reduce third-world populations, is equally anathema to the publicly professed purpose of the iRespond-IRC biometric identification program.

Not unlike the “sex-for-food” scandal in which IRC was once embroiled, this new initiative is placing refugees in the position of taking part in a massive technocratic experiment if they wish to eat or access other basic services. Though certainly not as egregious as a sex crime, it is nonetheless another means of exploiting the world’s most vulnerable populations under the guise of “helping” them, when those really being aided are the technocratic elite who aim to take this biometric identification program global in short order.

biometrics blockchain iRespond Mae La refugee camp Myanmar-Thailand border
sex-for-food



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19 comments



DATA4NOW says:
July 30, 2020 at 12:08 am

Check out #data4now UN – Jack Ma project, rollout across the developed world, with same sort of stated MO of alleviating poverty
Reply



Yuri Smouter says:

July 30, 2020 at 11:13 am

these NGOS when they work with government are just New Government organizations, and when created by governments are just a front for imperialism. Thank you Ms. Webb for exposing these scoundrels and wretched pukes. there should be massive public outcry about the IRC,CIDA,USAID and National Endowment for Democracy. They are imperial front groups and mob front groups.

Reply



Maricata says:

July 30, 2020 at 6:48 pm

Don't forget the Carlyle Group where war criminals abound.

Reply



Stephen Morrell says:

July 31, 2020 at 11:44 pm

Thank you Whitney for your excellent and thorough journalism. You're a rarity.

What needs to be pointed out in all of this is that these ruling class swine presume to have some god-given the 'right' to decide who is 'entitled', who lives and dies. This pilot appears to be aimed to eventual transform wage slavery into a micromanaged, 'digital accounting' wage slavery where non-conformity with their algorithm means you die. This biometric digitisation 'legitimizes' their rule via an 'objective' algorithm represents a vast expansion of their power to exploit to undreamt of proportions.

Only a Bolshevik revolution can put a stop to all this and the rest.

Reply



Roodolpt says:

August 2, 2020 at 10:13 am

I take it the bolshevik comment is sarcasm...

Reply



SharonM says:

August 4, 2020 at 9:52 am

Excellent article, thank you:)

Reply



SharonM says:

August 4, 2020 at 9:57 am

I'll take a Bolshevik revolution over the right wingers anytime;)

Reply



Ronald Joseph Weiss says:
August 4, 2020 at 10:41 pm

Whitney For President . Downside of that is They would kill you.

Reply



Daniel says:
May 23, 2021 at 5:26 pm

Sharon M

You should read the writings of Solzenitsyn.

Reply